

## **Matthew 5:1-12**

All Saints (Observed) + November 4, 2018  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
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Enough

The Word of the Lord from Matthew 5:11: "Blessed are you." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we observe the Festival of All Saints, and so we will begin with this question: what exactly does it take to be a saint?

At its most basic, a "saint" by definition is one who is holy. But can we be more specific?

I mean, for instance, the Roman Catholic Church has one definition; and if nothing else, it's attractive because it is so precise and measurable. First, you must have died. Second, your life must be one of good character and any writings you have left behind must be doctrinally pure. Third, it must be proven that you lived a heroically virtuous life, and/or died a martyr's death. Fourth, there must be evidence that God performed two miracles due to your intercession on behalf of those in need – before or after your death. This isn't a trivial list or process: each step to sainthood is thoroughly investigated by Vatican appointees.

As I said, if nothing else it's pretty tidy. With criteria like that, you can get a pretty good grasp of who the saints are to the point where you can make a list. According to those requirements, there are approximately 10,000 saints in the history of the Church. You might find it interesting that over 1300 of those have been added by the last three popes, with the current pope adding 892 all by himself; so canonization – the making of saints – is a current and ongoing thing.

We note, however, that the Roman Catholic requirements are established by that church body: they are not found as such in Scripture. However, some of those requirements, like living a virtuous life or dying as a martyr, sound an awful lot like our Gospel lesson for today, don't they?

We hear Jesus begin the "Sermon on the Mount" in our reading. Assuming that the saints are blessed and the blessed are saints, here you have your criteria for sainthood straight from the mouth of Jesus. If you are to be blessed, then be poor in spirit: then the kingdom of heaven is yours. Mourn appropriately, and you will be comforted. Be meek, and you'll inherit the earth – the new one, not this current dilapidated version. Hunger and thirst for righteousness, and you will be satisfied with it. Be merciful, and you'll receive mercy. Be pure in heart, and you'll see God. Be a peacemaker, and you'll be called a son of God. If you're persecuted for righteousness' sake, the kingdom of heaven is yours. If you're reviled, cursed or persecuted on account of Jesus, you're blessed.

There you go. You've got a list, and straight from the Savior's mouth. It's nine boxes to check instead of only four, but for the most part they sound a lot more reasonable. After all, it's easier to be meek than it is to work miracles, right? And it's easier to be poor in spirit than it is to be heroically virtuous, yes? Furthermore, Jesus doesn't say anything about a bunch of investigators doing a thorough job of scrutinizing everything you've ever done, said and written. That's kind of a disturbing thought, isn't it – a committee of investigators combing through your life? I mean, your paper trail might be sparse enough to leave the possibility that you qualify, but your browser history and social media posts would do you in for sure.

No, on the bright side, between you and sainthood there is not a panel of trained investigators dissecting your life and going through your drawers. On the not-so-bright-side, between you and

sainthood is the Lord of heaven and earth who knows your thoughts and searches your heart. When you consider that, the beatitudes start to lose their luster for sinners: if God searches your heart, He doesn't have to check your browser history to find sin.

While the beatitudes are often viewed as good advice for Christian living, they *are* unobtainable, aren't they? Many would say they are achievable; and thanks to your sinful nature, you'll tend to agree. You're constantly tempted to revise Jesus' words just a little bit by adding the word, "enough." That way, you can go around thinking, "As long as I am poor *enough* in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is mine. As long as I am merciful *enough*, I will receive mercy. As long as I am persecuted *enough* (but not too much!), I am blessed by God."

Sinners have a love/hate relationship with the word "enough," depending on who gets to decide the standard. If you get to decide what "enough" means, then you can say, "I am pure enough in heart to be blessed, so I declare myself a saint, and that's that. I will now notify the Lord that I have canonized myself." Much of the world will opt for this idea and maintain that the route to sainthood is "do the best you can, and God will give you the trophy for participation."

You know better. When it comes to holiness, the Lord doesn't deal in half-measures: to be holy is to be perfect and without sin. To be meek enough, for instance, is to never have a moment of pride. To hunger and thirst for righteousness enough is never to desire anything unrighteous. To be pure in heart is ... to be *pure* in heart, without any impurity or sin. To be reviled and persecuted enough is to take whatever the world dishes out and still pray for your enemies without a bit of self-pity, resentment toward them or bitterness toward God.

As beautiful as the beatitudes might sound, from the viewpoint of the law they are far from comforting. They're a list in which Jesus says, "This is what you've got to be and do perfectly if you are to be blessed and holy; and if you're not perfect and holy, then you're not a saint."

I'm out: that's a level of holiness I can't achieve. How 'bout you? If you still think that you can keep these beatitudes by your own nature and works, you'd better take another look at yourself. But if you agree that this is beyond you, then these beatitudes are indeed a blessing: because if this isn't in you, by the grace of God you might look to the One in whom it is. Namely, you look to Jesus.

You look to Jesus with the joy of knowing that He isn't sitting on that mountainside to give you an ultimatum of what you must do to be holy. He's preaching that sermon on the way to the cross, so that He might make you holy by His life and His sacrificial death. He fulfills these beatitudes perfectly, and He does so for you.

Every step of the way, the almighty Son of God – who deserves all honor and glory – is poor in spirit, and then He offers Himself for all the times that you're proud and selfish. Because He offers Himself, the kingdom of heaven is yours.

He rightly mourns the sinfulness and the lostness of mankind, and then He suffers your judgment so that you might be comforted. Remember, for His sake the kingdom of heaven is yours, not bondage in hell. Is there a greater comfort?

He – the Lord of heaven and earth – is perfectly meek so that you might be raised to a new heaven and a new earth, for He redeems you from all those times you arrogantly insist on your way.

He hungers and thirsts for righteousness: because you're so attracted to unrighteousness, He fasts in the desert and thirsts on the cross so that He might fill your plate and cup with righteousness overflowing. Your need for righteousness is satisfied – not one sin is left unforgiven.

He is merciful, so perfectly merciful that He takes your place and suffers God's wrath for your sin, including your lack of mercy for others. Greater love has no one than this; and because of His love, you can be sure that God is merciful toward you.

He is pure in heart – literally pure and without sin, so that He might bear your sin in your place. So you see God on the cross, sacrificing Himself for you; and so you will see God in glory, and you will not be ashamed.

He makes peace: not just between factions in a church or nation. He makes peace between you and God. This isn't achieved man's way by compromise, where His Father agrees to put up with some of your sins if you behave better. No, He achieves this by bearing all your sins to the cross so that there is no wall of hostility left between you and God. And if there is no hostility, you are no longer strangers and aliens: you are children of the Most High and members of His household.

He is persecuted so that you might be righteous. He is reviled, slandered, the innocent target of all sorts of evil accusations. He accepts them all as if He's guilty of them. He's not, of course: you are, but He's taking your place, dying your death, so that He might share with you His resurrection. Because He shares His resurrection, the kingdom of heaven is yours forever.

Jesus is the blessed One. As you'll sing in a few minutes, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Jesus fulfills the beatitudes, and now behold this miracle: because He is the blessed One and joins you to Himself, all of these blessings are yours.

This is your comfort as you confront your own sin and mortality: the risen Jesus forgives you and makes you His own. He is also your consolation as you mourn the death of those who have died in the faith. Here at Good Shepherd in the past year, we have bid farewell – for now – to James Brekke, Robert Miller, Viktoria Pennington, Rich Nyström, Mary Van Buskirk and JoAnn Webster. We could easily add many others – friends and loved ones – who were not members here but were in the prayers of the church, like Noel Newhouse, Robert Gregg, Jr., Lori Roser and Martha Gascon. For many of you, these might just be names because you did not have the pleasure of meeting them; for some of you, they were so dear. Our reason for joy in mourning is that the Lord knows their names, knows them as His children.

The Lord knows their names for the same reason He knows yours: He put His name on you, even as He wrote it in His book of life at your baptism. He cannot, will not, forget His people. So as you mourn the loss of loved ones or contemplate your own soul, you give thanks that God counts His people righteous for Jesus' sake. You hear our first lesson from Revelation 7 today, a vision of the saints around God's throne. There are not merely 10,000 or so present who have met the bar, but a great multitude that no one can number. And when one of the elders explains the crowd to John, he doesn't say, "These are the ones who were meek enough and poor in spirit enough and pure enough to make the cut."

Nope. He says, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

So you are washed clean, cleansed by the blood of Jesus, who lived that holy life and died that horrid death to redeem you.

His blood is enough. If you are washed clean of sin, then you are holy and pure.

And if you are holy and pure, then – in Christ and for His sake alone – you are a saint. Rejoice and be glad! Washed by the blood of Christ, you are a saint, for you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen